

CORRECTING THE ENGROSSMENT OF H.R. 2634, JUBILEE ACT FOR RESPONSIBLE LENDING AND EXPANDED DEBT CANCELLATION OF 2008

Mr. BACHUS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that in the engrossment of H.R. 2634 the Clerk be directed to execute the second instruction in the amendment conveyed by the motion to recommit as though it read "all that follows on that line" rather than "all that follows."

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HOLDEN). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Alabama?

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Mr. Speaker, reserving the right to object, it is important for the membership to understand what we have here, a need for the House to correct sloppy legislation, a use of the legislative process to score political points rather than to achieve public policy goals.

This is not a problem caused by the ranking member of the full committee, the gentleman Alabama. If you want to look at this as one big circus, today is the day that the gentleman from Alabama gets to clean up after the elephants. And I mean elephants.

What we have here, Members may have read this a week ago, there are people who specialize in writing recommittal motions that are not, in my judgment, constructive contributions to the legislative process but are "gotchas." And what happens is we work in committee, as we did on this bill to provide debt relief to poor countries, the gentleman from Alabama has been a stand-out advocate for debt relief for poor countries when his party was in the majority and now.

We worked together and came up with a very good bill. In fact, a large number of the groups that support fair treatment for the poorest in the world are going to celebrate that bill tonight. Fortunately, because we were able to fix this, they have something to celebrate. We almost ruined their celebration.

Because what happened was after all of the collaborative efforts in the Committee on Financial Services, as we finished the legislative process, after we adopted several amendments, including a manager's amendment that was predominantly constructed for the Republicans' concern, a Republican amendment offered by the gentleman from California (Mr. ROHRBACHER), one offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HASTINGS), we got a recommittal motion.

Now the way things have unfortunately worked around here, no one got to see, on our side, the recommittal motion until minutes before we had to debate it, and we have only 10 minutes. It was a policy statement that said no debt relief should go to anyone whose government has business interests with Iran.

By the way, Condoleezza Rice just came back from meeting with the Gulf Council, in which she was urging them

to give debt relief to Iraq; and they don't want to give debt relief to Iraq apparently for a number of reasons, but one of them, you can read it in today's Washington Post and yesterday's New York Times, is Iraq has too many dealings with Iran. Now they weren't technically covered by our bill, but if you are going to set forward the principle for the United States Congress that you don't give debt relief to people who do business with Iran and other people apply that principle, you won't get debt relief for Iraq because they have those relations given their proximity, the religious commonality, et cetera.

But to go back to this request and the need for it, the recommittal motion was so badly drafted that it knocked out many parts of the bill. In fact, the House took three votes last week: Two to adopt the Republican amendments and then one to adopt a Republican recommittal that killed the two Republican amendments.

I thought, well, maybe they didn't notice that we had amendments, but as the Parliamentarian had pointed out to us, this amendment was so sloppily drafted in the urge to score political points and not consult with anybody, I think, on either side in terms of committees, that it also killed some parts of the bill. It didn't simply do the amendment. You might say, well, they drafted to the bill and didn't look at the amendments. It killed parts of the bill.

I am going to withdraw my reservation, Mr. Speaker, because this is an important bill. But will no one learn from this? Can we not stop this process of ambush and last-minute recommittal motions that are not part of a constructive legislative process but are drafted purely to make political points and drafted badly and drafted not in consultation with any substantive knowledge?

So we are here today to undo much of the effects of a recommittal motion. We are here today because of "gotcha" politics that the minority leadership played, not the committee leadership, but the minority leadership.

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And so I would hope that they might have learned from this. And let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, my original intention was not to agree to this because I thought they just killed the Republican amendments. Luckily for them, they were even more incompetent in proposing that than I had thought they were, and they killed vital parts of this bill that we both need. So I am constrained to help them undo their own mistake.

And I would express the hope, probably in vain, that instead of continuing to use the recommittal motion in a way that has no constructive legislative purpose, but is truly to try and advance partisan agendas, that we can get a collaborative effort. That doesn't mean the recommittal motion shouldn't really put issues into play, of

course they should; that's partly what it's for. There's no need to hold it until the last minute. If we had had an hour's notice, we could have found that error. I found the error, but by the time I found it it was too late, we had already wrote it. So I hope out of this—I don't have a lot of hope, but I do hope—that those who have sort of taken the legislative process hostage by their need to politicize recommittal will learn from this. And I hope this is the last time we have to come here and correct this.

And I will just as I close predict again, it wasn't just badly drafted in the technical sense, I will predict that we will hear that if the United States Congress adopts as a principle that no debt relief goes to a country that has business with Iran, it will undercut Secretary Rice's efforts to get the Gulf Cooperation Council to give debt relief to Iraq. And I believe that we will not only have to correct this procedurally, we will have to correct it substantively.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my reservation.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Massachusetts?

There was no objection.

Mr. BACHUS. Mr. Speaker, in closing, let me thank the chairman for his willingness to allow this unanimous consent request.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Without objection, the gentleman from Alabama is recognized.

There was no objection.

Mr. BACHUS. Mr. Speaker, as I said, in closing, I want to thank Chairman FRANK of the full committee for his willingness to allow this unanimous consent request to be adopted. And as he would agree, this allows this very important piece of legislation to go to the Senate.

He and I and this body are joined, I think, in a bipartisan way to see that these 24 countries, heavily indebted poor countries, that hopefully this legislation will make its way through the Senate to the President, where he will sign it.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BACHUS. I would yield.

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Well, I hope that's the case. The gentleman mentioned the 24 countries. But if any of those countries emulates Iraq and perhaps buys oil from Iran, they won't get the debt relief under this recommittal. So I hope we can also correct that error.

Mr. BACHUS. Absolutely. And as the chairman knows, if this becomes legislation, then the Treasury Department would negotiate with these countries individually and come back to the Congress on an individual basis for approval. But it has, in the past, these efforts by the Congress, our legislation has had tremendously beneficial effects in alleviating poverty and suffering in these very poor countries. And I know